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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT -
Israeli-Lebanese Conflict: U.S. Middle East Policies
Middle East - Syria's Influence
Stem Cell Bill Veto
PARIS - Thursday, July 20, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Israeli-Lebanese Conflict: U.S. Middle East Policies
Middle East - Syria's Influence
Stem Cell Bill Veto

(B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Headlines today once again focus on the conflict between Israel and Lebanon and what is increasingly being perceived as a looming humanitarian catastrophe in Lebanon. Interviewed in right-of-center Le Figaro and on state-run France Inter radio, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora denounces Israel's "disproportionate reaction" to the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah. Left-of-center Le Monde highlights "Washington's loss of influence

in the region." Other stories examine Syrian and Iranian influence in the conflict. (See Part C)

"Lebanon Calling for Help" is left-of-center Liberation's headline this morning. "Though it is true that Tsahal's strikes have hit some of Hezbollah's infrastructures, it is the civilian population that has been the hardest hit," says the daily's editorial adding that: "the situation is such that international organizations and certain countries like France fear an impending humanitarian disaster in Lebanon."

In an interview in right-of-center Le Figaro, Fouad Siniora says: "I am imploring the international community to look at the situation in all fairness... It is Israel that is waging state-sanctioned terrorist acts... In the end it will get exactly the opposite of what it is hoping for by sparking a desire for revenge within the Lebanese population."

Catholic La Croix, for its part, contrasts the Israeli, Hezbollah, and Lebanese militaries in a two-page article entitled "Three Armed Forces, Three Strategies:" "With its vast arsenal...the Israeli military has enormous firepower, but also its weaknesses, namely against the asymmetric methods of Hezbollah."

Popular right-of-center daily Le Parisien carries an interview with Francois Gere, president of the French Institute for Strategic Analysis, under the title: "Four Reasons to be Afraid." According to Gere, protracted Israeli military operations in Lebanon and in Gaza, Syrian and Iranian direct involvement, and Western passivity are the greatest risks of the conflict.

Catholic La Croix carries an interview with another prominent French think-tanker: Pascal Boniface, director of the Institute of International and Strategic Relations, on Iran's influence in Lebanon. Although Boniface admits that historical, financial, and military ties exist between Iran and Lebanon, he dismisses the notion of Lebanon as Iran's puppet. Boniface believes Iran's strategy of confrontation is paying off, if only in the short run. To the Arab world, "Iran appears to be the only country capable of opposing the U.S. and Israel."

State-run France 3 television aired a report in which a Lebanese man declared: "Every 10 or 15 years they do this to us". In state-run France 2's report the journalist noted that the Lebanese government does not understand Israel's strategy and why they have chosen to destroy warehouses used for storing food or prevent the transportation of humanitarian aid. Privately-owned TF1 television as well as FR2 and FR3 all briefly mentioned President Chirac's statement, asking for "a humanitarian passage both within Lebanon and between Lebanon and border countries."

The Deputy Secretary General of the UN Jean-Marie Guehenno grants an interview to right-of-center Le Figaro in which he underscores that with regard to a stabilization operation in southern Lebanon "the UN is not equipped for coercion."

The second most prominently featured story in the French national press today is the controversial embryonic stem cell bill that President Bush has vetoed. Catholic La Croix examines the political ramifications of President Bush's veto, focusing especially on how the move divides the political terrain before the 2006 midterm elections. The article notes how the veto may catalyze some Republican members of Congress to distinguish themselves from an "increasingly unpopular president."

An article in right-of-center Le Figaro stresses that in spite of bi-partisan support for the stem cell bill and 70% of the American people favorable to federal funding for this research the President "is letting himself be swayed by the conservative religious groups that make up his electoral base." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Israeli-Lebanese Conflict: U.S. Middle East Policies

"Impatience"

The editorial by Antoine de Gaudemar in left-of-center Liberation (07/20): "Israel's retaliation may be in response to Hezbollah's

aggression, but it still appears to be disproportionate and particularly likely, because of its scope, to lead to tragic blunders. Past strategic strikes in Belgrade, Baghdad or Beirut in the end have always had the same deadly 'collateral' consequences... Even the U.S., that supports the Israeli offensive, is beginning to lose patience with regard to its ally. This may speed up the possibility of a cease fire that the Israeli military knows is inevitable even if it would like to put it off as long as possible. Contrary to what he says, Ehoud Olmert does not have all the time in the world to deal with Lebanon."

"Washington aligned with Israel has lost its influence in the region"

Eric Leser in left-of-center Le Monde writes (07/20): "The military escalation between Hezbollah and Israel increasingly sheds light on the powerlessness of American diplomacy in the Middle East... In the name of the war on terrorism, American diplomacy has burned all of its bridges with Damascus, Hezbollah or Hamas and observers see Israel's turning to Russia to establish contact with Syria as a sign of America's incapacity... As for Israel, the U.S. still has a great deal of influence that it is not using... In order to counterbalance its failures in Iraq, the White House has regularly made a show of what has been achieved in Israel, Lebanon and Afghanistan in terms of promoting peace and democracy. The withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza were presented as diplomatic victories... But the electoral triumph of Hezbollah and Hamas tend to demonstrate that terrorism and democracy are not mutually exclusive in spite of what the White House likes to repeat."

Middle East - Syria's Influence

"Syria's Crocodile Tears"

Georges Malbrunot in right-of-center Le Figaro (07/20): "Damascus is pretending to feel sorry for Lebanon... but is having a hard time hiding its satisfaction behind its fake tears. After the assassination of Rafic Hariri, Syria was forced to withdraw from Lebanon... Fifteen months after this humiliation, the Syrian regime is not unhappy to see its former vassal plunged in a war with Israel... But after a period of intense pressure on Syria, the international community let up... In fact the U.S. needs Syria to appease the situation in Iraq... And France has had to come to terms with the idea that lacking tangible proof of Syria's involvement in the assassination of Rafic Hariri, there is no point in continuing to try to hermetically isolate Damascus. The international community needs Syria to temper Hezbollah which is why the all-powerful head of Syrian intelligence, and brother-in-law of Bachar al Assad, is in Paris today..."

Stem Cell Bill Veto

"Cloning and Ethics"

The unsigned editorial in left-of-center Le Monde (07/20): "The American Senate's vote to pass a bill authorizing federal funding for stem cell research marks an important step in the complex relationship between politics, science and ethics. Rightly so, George W. Bush put forward that this law imposes a choice between science and ethics... true to his convictions, he said that he would veto the bill... But very influential Republicans, such as Nancy Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger, are actively working to push the Bill forward... But the fact remains that no democracy can afford not to question the ethics of stem cell research... and unlike in 2002, the issue will certainly be a determining factor in the upcoming presidential election in France."

"Bush Uses His Veto Against Stem Cells"

The Washington correspondent for right-of-center Le Figaro, Philippe Gelie comments that (07/20): "Morals remain the guiding principal for all of the most controversial decisions that George W. Bush has had to make in his career... And for the first time yesterday, since taking office, he used his power to veto a bill that he views as not conforming to his 'values.'" STAPLETON